

CONFERENCE DEVOTIONS 01/10/09

I have been travelling around in recent weeks promoting the new strategic directions of UnitingCare NSW.ACT, but more particularly emphasising the way in which UnitingCare participates in the mission of the Church. Last Sunday I was in Port Macquarie, the previous Sunday in Wollongong and the Sunday before that in Jannali. In a couple of weeks I will be in Tullibigeal with the same agenda. As the Old Testament Lesson I have been using a well known text from the book of the Prophet Micah. I want to read it to you now:

In my Bible this section is headed up “What God Requires”

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my first born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God”

We could say that those words from the prophet Micah are a part of the fundamental understanding of the Christian faith, reinforced and given more emphasis by the life and teachings of Jesus who reached out to the people on the edge, who accepted the unacceptable, and broke down barriers of discrimination. Who, when a man asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life said to him: “Go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor”. Who summed up the law with the words: “Love God with heart

and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself”.

So, how is it that I have to emphasise that the work of UnitingCare is an integral part of the mission of the Church? Shouldn't it be obvious? Indeed, it ought to be, but a strange notion seems to have arisen in the Church that if justice and kindness are delivered by a thoroughly professional and competent organisation like UnitingCare then it doesn't count as the mission of the Church.

I have the privilege from my position of being able to look across UnitingCare and see the big picture of what we are doing. I don't have an encyclopaedic knowledge of UnitingCare Ageing, but I see enough to know that for certain to know that we following the words of the prophet Micah and we are doing justice and loving kindness in the work that we do. So I am certainly taking as many opportunities as I can to tell the story of UnitingCare to the rest of

the Church and to assure them that we are very much a part of the mission of the Church.

As I have said very often, service to our neighbours, especially those in need, doesn't have to have a religious veneer added to it to make it acceptable to God. Justice and kindness in themselves are a worthy sacrifice, more worthy indeed, as Micah has said, than thousands of rivers of oil.

When you are helping older people find happiness, peace, and contentment, you are serving God. And you don't have to be a religious believer to do that. I am proud of the work that is done by the staff of UnitingCare and I would be very happy to offer it as an appropriate gift with which to come before God. If what the Lord requires is to "do justice and to love kindness", then I consider that the work of UnitingCare is a very appropriate offering.

UnitingCare is the Uniting Church at work in the world, every day, every week, every year. While we are not the whole story of the Church's mission of social responsibility we are certainly a big part of it.

Let Us Pray.

Almighty God, may all that we do be a right offering to you, an offering of doing justice and loving kindness. May the work we do glorify your name and give praise to your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.